of plague from Europe may be explained by the known ability of *P. pestis* to mutate into *P. pseudotuberculosis* which is largely European in its distribution. Such a mutation could have supplanted *P. pestis* by causing epizootics which gave rise to a cross-immunity among rodents, and recent work by Lawton & Surgalla (1963) has at least demonstrated scientifically that this is possible.

Whether such a mutation can have been encouraged by general improvements in hygiene and health and economic conditions remains a matter for conjecture. Thus, although I hope that the history of plague can be seen more clearly when due attention is paid to social and economic factors, it nevertheless must be admitted that the suddenness of the disappearance of plague three hundred years ago is not yet fully understood; plague will still be a subject of discussion at the quatercentenary.

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Daniel Defoe and the Great Plague of London

'A plague is a formidable enemy' (Defoe)

The impact which Defoe's book 'A Journal of the Plague Year' has had on all subsequent commentators is such that it appears impossible now to discuss the awful events of 1665 without some reference to this publication, though it appeared fifty-seven years later, in 1722. As an instance of this influence, it may suffice to quote Bell (1951): 'In the absence (of an authentic history of the Great Plague) we have drawn all our ideas of that tragic time . . . from Defoe's vivid "Journal".'

Nicholson, writing in 1919, has attempted, unwisely perhaps, to set up Defoe's 'Journal' as an authentic history. That it is not, and never was intended to be so, must be accepted. Defoe wrote at a time when the plague of Marseilles was raging, and Defoe was an opportunist, quick to seize a chance to write a popular story, and a cautionary one. In fact, certain aspects mentioned in Defoe are recorded in the history of the 1720 epidemic at Marseilles, and it is evident that Defoe had used travellers' tales from this and other Continental epidemics as source material.

That Defoe succeeded brilliantly is a commonplace. But that he wrote an accurate and detailed history of the Great Plague may be doubted. It was Bell (1951) who pointed out that while Defoe used as his main source 'The Orders Conceived . . . by the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London concerning the Infection of the Plague', these orders in fact related to the plague of 1646, being reissued in 1665. Defoe reproduces the 'Orders' in full, and elaborates his story upon and around them.

Again, Defoe introduces by way of corroborative detail, or even light relief, if such be possible in so desperate a tale, several stories of the behaviour of individuals in this time of trial. Such was the story of the three brothers, Thomas the lame sailor, John the biscuit-baker, and Richard the joiner, who decided to leave the city and tramp into Essex. Their adventures are told in some detail and enable Defoe to show the reactions of the good, but cautious, citizens of Walthamstow and Epping, towards an itinerant and potentially infected group who came from the plague-ridden city. Suspicion lay on all sides. So detailed a story must have been invention, though it is by no means unlikely that Defoe had heard of such adventures at first hand.

Daniel Defoe was born in 1661 in the parish of St Giles, Cripplegate. His father was a butcher named Foe, but for some unknown reason the son adopted the prefix in 1703, becoming De Foe, or Defoe. He was brought up as a dissenter and trained for the ministry, but he forsook this for trade about 1685, and is usually described as a hosier, though he was probably a hose factor, a middleman, and at one time affluent, though later impoverished.

His rebellious and non-conformist nature led him into clashes with the Jacobite Establishment, but he won the confidence of William III particularly following the publication of 'The True-Born Englishman, A Satyr' in 1701. A year later he brought out 'The Shortest Way with Dissenters', a pamphlet of some force and of true satire. This was burned by order of Parliament, and a reward offered for his arrest, when he was described as 'a middle sized spare man about 40 years old, of a brown complexion and dark brown coloured hair but wears a wig, with a hooked nose, sharp chin, grey eyes, and a large mole near his mouth'. Defoe was arrested and pilloried, but his pillory was garlanded by the people, who drank his health and bought his poem 'A Hymn to the Pillory', which he wrote for the occasion.

The 'Journal of the Plague Year' was written in 1722, three years after his even more famous work of fiction based on fact, 'Robinson Crusoe', but these were two among many. The list of his works occupies three and a half columns in the Dictionary of National Biography. Defoe died in 1731, aged 70.

Daniel Defoe was thus no more than 4 years old during the time of the Great Plague. We do not know whether he and his family remained in London. They had relatives in Northamptonshire, so the child may have been taken out of the City. It is likely that his earliest childhood memories were of sad faces, the tolling of the Bearers' bell and cries of 'bring out your dead'. Again, older friends would have horrifying tales to impart, of 'hired nurses who attended sick people, using them barbarously, starving them, smothering them, or by other wicked means hastening their end', to quote his own words: of the drunken piper who was roused as he was about to be cast into the pit (this story is also told in one of the Vienna epidemics),[1] and of Solomon Eagle, the Quaker, who paraded the town naked, with lighted coals upon his head, prophesying a doom which was only too apparent to all.

Quite often Defoe writes 'he told me himself', as of the young man sent to collect a debt, who after knocking three times, was met by 'the man of the house who came to the door . . . in his breeches, no stockings . . . a white cap on his head' and, as the young man said, 'death in his face'.

Such stories, though afflicting in themselves, are of the essence of Defoe's 'Journal', adding verisimilitude and variety to a narrative which, baldly told, might have been so grisly as to be barely credible.

For Defoe spares no distressing detail, misses no tragic point. Here is his description of the plight of the poor people – and it should be remembered that this was largely a plague of the poor:

'The misery of that time lay upon the poor, who, being infected, had neither food nor physic; neither physician nor apothecary to assist them, nor nurse to attend them. Many of those died calling for help, and even for sustenance, out at their windows, in a most miserable and deplorable manner; but it must be added, that whenever the cases of such persons or families were represented to my Lord Mayor, they always were relieved.

'It is true, that in some houses where the people were not very poor, yet, where they had sent perhaps their wives and children away (and if they had any servants, they had been dismissed); I say, it is true, that to save the expenses, many such as these shut themselves in, and, not having help, died alone' (p 113).[2]

With all his feeling for the drama and immediacy of the occasion, Defoe also wrote words of advice and warning:

'And here I may be able to make an observation or two of my own, which may be of use hereafter to those into whose hands this may come, if they should ever see the like dreadful visitation. First, the infection generally came into the houses of the citizens by the means of their servants, whom they were obliged to send up and down the streets for necessaries, that is to say, for food or physic; to bake-houses, brew-houses, shops, etc., and who, going necessarily through

[1] A contemporary statue of the 'Plague-piper' may be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum

[2] Page references from Brayley's (1876) revision of Defoe's 'Journal'

the streets into shops, markets, and the like, it was impossible but that they should, one way or other, meet with distempered people, who conveyed the fatal breath into them, and they brought it home to the families to which they belonged. Secondly, it was a great mistake, that such a great city as this had but one Pest-house; for had there been, instead of one Pest-house, viz. beyond Bunhill-fields, where, at most, they could receive perhaps 200 or 300 people; I say, had there, instead of that one, been several Pest-houses, every one able to contain a thousand people without lying two in a bed, or two beds in a room; and had every master of a family as soon as any servant (especially) had been taken sick in his house, been obliged to send them to the next Pest-house, if they were willing, as many were, and had the examiners done the like among the poor people, when any had been stricken with the infection, – I say, had this been done where the people were willing (not otherwise), and the houses not been shut, I am persuaded, and was all the while of that opinion, that not so many, by several thousands, had died; for it was observed, and I could give several instances within the compass of my own knowledge, that where a servant had been taken sick, and the family had either time to send him out, or retire from the house, and leave the sick person, as I have said above, they were all preserved; whereas, when upon one or more sickening in a family, the house has been shut up, the whole family have perished, and the bearers been obliged to go in to fetch out the dead bodies, none being able to bring them to the door; and at last none left to do it' (p 97).

Elsewhere (p 239) Defoe mentions two Pest-houses 'one in the fields beyond Old Street and one in Westminster' but states that no compulsion was used in taking people to them, while other temporary isolation houses were in fact erected, as in the parish of St. Giles.

We can here, I believe, detect one of Defoe's sources. In 1721, Sir John Colbatch, a prolific writer of catchpenny medical works, published his 'Scheme for Proper Methods to be taken should it please God to visit us with the plague': in this little book, amid much confused thinking and remnants of medieval lore, Colbatch produced the idea of segregation, though even this was by no means original. He suggested the establishment of special public infirmaries for plague victims, and was against the idea of sealing the houses of the infected with the inhabitants, both sick and well, within them. There can be no doubt that this work was seen by Defoe, writing a year later.

Yet another source from which Defoe would have acquired information is the 'Loimologia or an Historical Account of the Plague in London in 1665 with precautionary Directions against the like Contagion by Nathaniel Hodges M.D. Fellow of the College of Physicians, who resided in the City all that time'. This was a translation by John Quincy in 1720, of the original Latin version of 1672, and it is of interest that the copy of this translation in the library of the Royal Society of Medicine has on the title page 'presented by Mr Hunter', in John Hunter's handwriting.[1] This translation was so popular that it went to three editions within a year.

Nathaniel Hodges (*1629–88*) acquired much renown among the citizens of London for his work among them during the plague. Munk's 'Roll' states that he was twice attacked by the disease, though his authority for this is not given.

In the year following the plague, Hodges wrote 'An Account of the first rise, progress, symptoms and cure of the Plague, being the substance of a letter from Dr Hodges to a Person of Quality, from his house in Watling Street, 8th May 1666'. Munk regarded this as the most authentic account of the Great Plague which we possess. It is now a most rare pamphlet.

Whether Defoe saw this latter publication cannot be stated – he may have done so. That he knew of Hodges is sure, for the latter is mentioned in the 'Journal', and it is almost certain, from internal evidences, that Defoe knew the 1720 translation of Hodges' 'Loimologia'. It may be, too, that the imaginary Dr Heath, 'my particular friend', as Defoe described him, is based on Dr Hodges.

Manifestations of the Disease

Let us now briefly consider one or two aspects of the disease itself, as seen by Defoe. If we first look at the ideas of the mode of spread of the infection, we find them to be, as we would expect, quite nugatory. The question of some microscopic medium had, indeed, been previously suggested, but Defoe, after denying that the infection was spread by 'Steams, Fumes or other Effluvia', or by immediate visitation from Heaven, adds:

'So likewise of the opinion of others, who talk of infection being carried on by the air only, by carrying with it vast numbers of insects, and invisible creatures, who enter into the body with the breath, or even at the pores with the air, and there generate, or emit most acute poisons, or poisonous ova, or eggs, which mingle themselves with the blood, and so infect the body' (p 99).

and

'My friend, Dr. Heath, was of opinion that it might be known by the smell of their breath; but hen, as he said, who durst smell to that breath for his information? since to know it, he must draw the stench of the Plague up into his own brain, in order to distinguish the smell! I have heard it was the opinion of others, that it might be distinguished by the party's breathing upon a piece of glass, where the breath condensing, there might living creatures be seen by a microscope,

[1]We do not know to whom it was presented

of strange, monstrous, and frightful shapes, such as dragons, snakes, serpents, and devils, horrible to behold: but this I very much question the truth of, and we had no microscopes[1] at that time, as I remember, to make the experiment with' (p 266).

Dr Hodges was of a iatrochemical mind, believing in a nitro-aerial spirit (normally beneficial) emanating from the soil; he wrote:

'A saline Spirit hath a great share in giving Rise to a Pestilence ... a skilful and upright Physician bends his whole Care at first to prevent its Attack, which he does by the Use of oleaginous Substances, by that Means expecting to cover over the Stomach as it were with a Plaster, to guard it against sharp and corrosive *Effluvia*.'

Hodges' views on the microscope were definite, not to say derogatory:

'As for that Opinion of the famous *Kircher*, about animated Worms, I must confess I never could come at any such Discovery with the Help of the best Glasses ... but perhaps in our cloudy Island we are not so sharp-sighted as in the serene Air of *Italy*, and with Submission to so great a name, it seems to me very disconsonant to Reason that such a pestilential *Seminium*, which is both of a nitrous and poisonous Nature, should produce a living Creature.'

The reference is to the well-known pioneer in microscopy, Athanasius Kircher (1602–80), in whose 'Scrutinium pestis' (1658) we find the observation that the blood of plague patients carried numberless 'worms', not visible to the naked eye. Friedrich Loeffler suggested that these were probably rouleaux of red blood cells, since Kircher could not have seen the plague bacillus with his 32 power lenses, but Kircher's 'worm' theory was a source of much subsequent controversy and comment, mainly of an adverse nature. None the less Kircher deserves credit for his pioneer suggestion that disease could be due to microscopic animals. It is of interest also to find a reference to the fact that Dr Walter Charlton (1619–1707), physician to Charles II, and an original Fellow of the Royal Society, ascribed the first ideas of 'vermification of the air' to Sir George Ent (1604–89), William Harvey's friend, protégé and supporter, though the original reference in Ent's work has not been found.

On the subject of the spread of infection it is noteworthy that injunctions were given in the Lord Mayor's 'Orders' to kill all cats and dogs, and Defoe says that incredible numbers were slaughtered:

'I think they talked of forty thousand dogs, and five times as many cats! few houses being without a cat, some having several, sometimes five or six in a house. All possible endeavours were used also to destroy the mice and rats, especially the latter, by laying rats-bane, and other poisons for them, and a prodigious multitude of them was also destroyed' (p 159).

This is reminiscent of a report of the 1720 plague of Marseilles, that the fishermen netted ten thousand dead animals in the harbour, and dragged the corpses out to sea. Nowhere else has a reference to destruction of rats been found. Hodges simply states: 'All dogs and cats and other domestic brutes, should be killed.'

Boghurst, the apothecary, in his 'Loimographia' refers to the use of arsenic amulets to such an extent, that: 'Sure the rat-killers will have a sweeping trade next year, the arsenic and rat bane being all spent and the cats killed', implying that the rats were not specifically dealt with.

Quarantine

The vexed question of quarantine was one which showed the impossibility of maintaining any proper surveillance, and indeed, many authoritative people, Defoe included, regarded it as a means productive of more disease, rather than of lessening it, since the sound were shut up with the sick. But though the length of the incarceration, established in the reign of Henry VIII, had been reduced for humanitarian reasons to twenty-eight days in the plague year of 1646, yet in 1665 the literal quarantine of forty days was enforced. This was in spite of the Lord Mayor's 'Orders' which stated that any person sick of the plague 'shall be sequestered and if he die not, the house wherein he sickened shall be shut up for a month, after the use of the due Preservatives taken by the rest'.

Needless to say many people evaded the quarantine order, and Defoe tells several tales of houses found empty, save for the dead, the living members of the household having escaped through a back door or window in spite of the watch. Defoe writes:

'Forty days is, one would think, too long for nature to struggle with such an enemy as this, and not conquer it or yield to it; but I could not think, by my own observation, that they can be infected so as to be contagious to others above fifteen or sixteen days at farthest; and on that score it was, that when a house was shut up in the city, where any one had died of the Plague, and nobody appeared to be ill in the family for sixteen or eighteen days after, they were not so strict, but that they would connive at their going privately abroad' (p 259).

The 'Tokens'

Of all the signs manifested in this epidemic none were more remarkable, or remarked upon, than the 'tokens', so called because they usually betokened approaching death.

[1]Though Robert Hooke published 'Micrographia' in this same year, 1665

'Many persons', writes Defoe, 'never perceived that they were infected till they found, to their unspeakable surprise, the tokens come out upon them, after which they seldom lived six hours; for those spots they called the tokens were really gangrenous spots, or mortified flesh, in small knobs as broad as a little silver penny, and hard as a piece of callus or horn, so that when the disease was come up to that length, there was nothing could follow but certain death, and yet, as I said, they knew nothing of their being infected, nor found themselves so much as out of order, till those mortal marks were upon them: but everybody must allow that they were infected in a high degree before, and must have been so some time; and consequently their breath, their sweat, their very clothes, were contagious for many days before' (p 257).

Defoe recounts a few cases which 'came in the compass of my observation'. Both Hodges and Boghurst describe the 'tokens' as sure forewarnings of death, their description being very similar to that given by Defoe, even to the size being likened to that of a silver penny.

The 'tokens' were probably petechial hæmorrhages, and are perhaps commoner in some epidemics than others. They do not appear to be separately described by later clinicians of plague, but Cantlie (1901) mentioned petechiæ occurring just before death, over the abdomen and the bubonic enlargements. He also described subcutaneous hæmorrhages generally spreading from an inflamed gland, and more common in some epidemics than in others.

Buboes

Since the name 'bubonic plague' is derived from the characteristic enlargements of the lymph glands, those of the inguinal region being particularly noticeable, it is perhaps surprising that such manifestations were not more extensively noted by Defoe.

However, he was not writing clinically, and he did not mention the word 'bubo', but he did describe (p 108) the pain of the swelling as being particularly severe, especially when treated by violent drawing plasters or by scarification. Other plague writers wrote a great deal about the subject; e.g.: 'The more buboes there are, so that they suppurate, the better. Carbuncles are always more dangerous than buboes' (Hodges, p 150).

In general, the bubonic form of the plague was less likely to be fatal than the pneumonic or septicæmic, and it is apparent that this epidemic was not characterized by a preponderance of the bubonic type of case.

The Types of Plague

Cantlie (1901) described seven main types, of which bubonic, pneumonic, septicæmic and neurologic are the most important. All these types occurred in the Great Plague and some may be identified in Defoe's writings.

The septicæmic type, sudden in onset and virulent, appears to be described in a number of instances, as, for example:

'One family without the Bars, and not far from me,[1] were all seemingly well on the Monday, being ten in family; that evening one maid and one apprentice were taken ill and died the next morning, when the other apprentice and two children were touched, whereof one died the same evening, and the other two on Wednesday. In a word, by Saturday at noon, the master, mistress, four children, and four servants, were all gone, and the house left entirely empty, except an ancient woman, who came in to take charge of the goods for the master of the family's brother, who lived not far off, and who had not been sick' (p 225).

The manic form of neurologic manifestation appears in the following description:

'In these walks, I had many dismal scenes before my eyes, as particularly of persons falling dead in the streets, terrible shrieks and screechings of women, who in their agonies would throw open their chamber windows, and cry out in a dismal and surprising manner; it is impossible to describe the variety of postures in which the passions of the poor people would express themselves.

'Passing through Token-house Yard, in Lothbury, of a sudden a casement violently opened just over my head, and a woman gave three frightful screeches, and then cried, "*Oh! Death, Death, Death!*" in a most inimitable tone, and which struck me with horror and a chilness in my very blood. There was nobody to be seen in the whole street, neither did any other window open; for people had no curiosity now in any case; nor could anybody help one another; so I went on to pass into Bell-Alley' (p 107).

All authors agree that infection during pregnancy was fatal, abortion occurring before death, while deaths during childbirth were increased by the absence of midwives, many of whom died. Defoe (p 153) gives mortality figures showing the differences between January/February 1665 (before the plague) and August/September 1665 (at the height of the epidemic) in which the childbed mortality increased by fourfold, even though the population was greatly decreased. Boghurst (p 25) records that only one in forty 'teeming women' survived infection.

Treatment

Mention has been made of Defoe's preventive ideas. Medicaments were of course used as prophylactics, though Defoe recommends nothing

[1]Defoe, as observer of the Plague, was supposed to live 'without Aldgate, about mid-way between Aldgate Church and Whitechapel bars, on the left hand, or north side, of the street'

but keeping a preparation of strong scent 'in case I met with anything of offensive smells or a dead body'. Hodges gives a detailed account of his personal prophylactic measures:

'As soon as I rose in the Morning early, I took the Quantity of a Nutmeg of *Anti-pestilential Electuary* . . .' on entering the houses of the sick, 'I immediately had burnt some proper Thing upon Coals and also kept in my Mouth some Lozenges. Before Dinner, I always drank a Glass of *Sack*, to warm the stomach' (Hodges, p 223).

Dr Hodges was a great believer in the efficacy of sack and it is sad to record that he died in Ludgate debtors' prison in June 1688, possibly a victim of the potation which he had learned to imbibe so copiously as a prophylactic.

Tobacco was held in great esteem, though Defoe thought little of it and Boghurst had a personal vendetta against it which has a modern sound: 'I never took a pipe this year, nor ever will. How many thousands of tobacco smokers, think you, died this year?' (p 55).

Medicaments and quack remedies were recommended on all sides. Defoe's Dr Heath said that if all the prescriptions of all the physicians in London were examined, it would be found that they were all compounded of the same things, with such variations only as the particular fancy of the doctor leads him to.

Conclusion

In 1722, Daniel Defoe, wit, satirist and journalist, produced a great social document, from which brief extracts only have been given. One can convey little of the descriptions of horror with which Defoe invests his story, nor have his non-medical sources been mentioned, for instance, the poem of George Withers, 'Britain's Remembrancer' which describes the plague of 1625, or Thomas Dekker's 'Seven Deadly Sins of London' (1606), from both of which he borrowed.

Defoe's 'Journal', though written long after the event, and though of imaginative construction, nevertheless gives us a picture of these grievous events which has ever since affected men's views of those terrible times. Had London suffered again, as was feared, Defoe's writings would have ranked with those of the medical plague-authors in their use and value to the community.

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Plague Churches, Monuments and Memorials[1]

In England, there is a tendency to think of the Plague of London of 1665 as being an isolated event and the final visitation of that Pest to this country. However, the outbreak which we, in London, commemorate this year was part of an endemic disease which had ravaged Europe, including England, since the Black Death in the fourteenth century and which continued to take its toll on the Continent for nearly a century after it had finally left this island.

This paper will deal with some of the memorials of plague which I have seen in Europe.

As the true ætiology of the disease was not known many were the causes to which it was attributed. Thousands of Jews, heretics and witches, accused of spreading the disease by poisoning wells, infecting the air or smearing 'plague ointment', were burned and murdered. But by some the plague was considered evidence of the wrath of God, for did not the Psalmist say.

'God judgeth the righteous and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready.'

Plague Saints

Christ, the Madonna, the Trinity and various saints were invoked by the faithful (and the hopeful) to intercede, on their behalf, with an angered God and vows were made for the building of churches and other votives if their prayers were answered. We therefore find these votives and memorials, in the form of churches, chapels, monuments, altar-pieces and paintings throughout Europe.

The saints who were specially invoked were:

[1]This paper was illustrated with 45 slides